Power Play: Turning Patriarchy to Matriarchy in Aduibert's *Taming of the Shrew*

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In 2019, Justin Audibert used cross-gender casting in the RSC's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, setting the play in an alternate Elizabethan era where women hold power over men.[1] Inspired by Naomi Alderman's matriarchal sci-fi novel *The Power*, Audibert's production changes characters and lines in the play to reflect a matriarchy that is the direct inverse of the patriarchy portrayed in Shakespeare's *Shrew*.[2] In a casting experiment some reviewers dismissed as a "gimmick"[3] or an attempt at "political correctness,"[4] Audibert swaps the genders of most of the characters in the play, with an emphasis on placing female characters in roles of power. Katherine and Bianca (Bianco, in this production) are re-gendered as male and many of the male characters are re-named and re-written as female (Petruchio becomes Petruchia, Lucentio is Lucentia, etc.). There is particular resonance to using this technique with *Shrew*, which owes its problem-play status to the brutality of the power imbalance in the central relationship between Katherine and Petruchio. The visual and textual coding of female authority and male subservience in the production demonstrates that the societal inequities of Shakespeare's Padua go beyond the Katherine/Petruchio marriage, however. Audibert's world-building reverses the power imbalance in Shakespeare's *Shrew* rather than removing or correcting it, illustrating that any systemic power imbalance is destructive to communities as well as

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individuals. Although Audibert's staged matriarchy is not idealized as a solution for patriarchy or for the problems of the *Shrew*, his gender-swapped casting presents an innovative alternative for gender parity on the Shakespearean stage.

On Not Fixing *Shrew*

Ayanna Thompson named *The Taming of the Shrew* as one of Shakespeare's three "toxic plays" (along with *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*) that continuously inspire (failed) attempts "to recuperate them and make them progressive texts." Thompson argues that no matter what changes a director makes, "ultimately, those three [plays] end up kind of circling us back to a really regressive and uncomfortable standpoint… with *Taming of The Shrew*, it's deep misogyny."[5] The same instinct that Thompson observes in directors who try to rehabilitate the play also drives audiences to expect rehabilitation in appropriation. That Audibert's production was advertised as a matriarchy contributes to the expectation of a social solution in the performance choices. Due to the idealization of an imagined matriarchal pre-history and goddess culture[6] among first-wave feminist thinkers who "regard patriarchy as downfall rather than progress,"[7] audiences might have expected a more positive portrayal of powerful women rather than a matriarchal society that reinforces many of the constraints and inequities associated with patriarchy.

The most consistent fault that reviewers found with Audibert's *Shrew* was that gender-swapping had not fixed the play, and that the problems of patriarchy are not solved by putting women in power instead of men. Responses to the production regularly included praise for the show's directing, acting, costuming, and movement, but many reviewers and scholars also observed that the matriarchal setting did not present a positive alternative to patriarchal control. Amy Borsuk's review issues a definitive verdict: "I think the results are clear: gender-swapping alone isn't really 'fixing' the problems of the play, or of our world, if it repeats the power imbalances of the patriarchy."[8] Gerald Berkowitz offers similar criticism, maintaining that "a male Katherine being tamed and broken in spirit by a female Petruchio does not solve any of the play's problems and creates new ones."[9] In her thoughtful academic

review for the *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Ella Hawkin is likewise clear that "exchanging the play's patriarchy for a matriarchy did not fix the problems inherent in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Rather than attempting to explain, erase, or problematize the structures of control and abuse represented in Shakespeare's text, this production simply transferred all accountability to women."[10] Fulbright scholar and playwright Katharine Cognard-Black admits similar frustration with Audibert's production. Despite her "high hopes that it would address the troubled issue of gender in Shakespeare's text," Cognard-Black expresses concern both that the production "actually villainized women in an attempt to make clear the aggressions of men in the flesh-and-blood world beyond the theater" and that the staging of Katherine's final monologue reminds audiences that they are "still in a patriarchy rather than a matriarchy."[11] Her disappointment helped motivate her to write and direct her own creatively critical response to Shakespeare's *Shrew*, which has since been performed and published. Reactions such as these reveal that our collective expectation of systemic gender inequality is so deeply ingrained that a performance portraying a reversal of the problem can be criticized for not being a solution.

Yet Audibert never implies on stage or states in interviews that oppression is better coming from women than from men. In fact, his program notes suggest the opposite—that audiences will find the play more shocking because mothers are controlling sons rather than fathers controlling daughters.[12] During the play's initial run in Stratford-upon-Avon, I was fortunate enough to interview Audibert about the production to gain some insight into his choices, which were designed to call attention to play's problematic power imbalances rather than solving them. He explained the thematic implications of the gender-swapping as a way of forcing audiences to confront the inequities of our own history of gender roles: "it is about power and about a power imbalance and about how…when you live in a society where the rules of that society are unequal… what does that do to people? And that's the thing, I suppose, that we explore, we just explore it the other way around."[13] There is a tendency to focus solely on the play's central Katherine/Petruchio relationship as a physical and mental power struggle between two individuals—an isolated battle of the sexes. Audibert's gender-

swapping makes it clear that Katherine's taming cannot be easily separated from the larger societal inequities surrounding gender. Audibert's production mainstains that it is not the "patria" of patriarchy that is the problem, but the drive of any group to hold dominion over another. The production illustrates a reversed patriarchy that explores existing and historical power dynamics by throwing them into stark relief, and it uses the novelty of female dominance to suggest that any systemic power imbalance can overwhelm individual strength and resistance.

Cross-Gender Casting and Representation

The cross-gender casting of Audibert's *Shrew* does not provide an in-world solution to the problems of gender inequality within Katherine's Padua or an implied solution to the patriarchal constraints women face today. The production does, however, present an important case study for expanding representation for women in performances of early modern plays that have more male than female characters. Because the inequities the production explores are systemic, the cross-gender casting is extensive and consistent with the production's world-building. In coordinating the reversed gender ratio of the actors on the stage with the inversion of the power dynamics of the play, Audibert's *Shrew* enacts an alternate framework for casting women on the contemporary Shakespearean stage. As published, Shakespeare's play has only three female characters, but directors regularly try to find ways to include more women on stage. For companies such as the Globe or the Royal Shakespeare Company, this practice demonstrates a commitment to equity on stage. The RSC 2019 summer season, which included Audibert's *Shrew*, emphasized efforts to build a diverse and inclusive company. The casting call for *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, and *Measure for Measure* included a promise to build "a consciously diverse cast" for all three productions.[14] For some directors, though, particularly those working for high school and college theatre programs, cross-gender casting becomes a necessity because performers of one gender might make up the majority of the audition pool. Audibert's conscious re-gendering of the most socially powerful characters in a play to indicate a matriarchal society and explore the aesthetics

of female power could be a useful technique for directors looking to address issues of onstage gender equity in their own protections.

Casting women in traditionally male Shakespearean roles, even those that convey power and authority, is not in itself a new or unique practice. The history of cross-gender casting in Shakespearean stage and film, spanning from before Asta Nielson's 1921 Hamlet to after Helen Mirren's 2010 Prospera, is too long and varied to address in this article. It is worth noting, though, that the years preceding Audibert's *Shrew* featured some key stage performances by prominent actresses taking on traditionally male roles. Glenda Jackson played Lear at the Old Vic in 2016 and on Broadway in 2019. Tamsin Grieg played Malvolio as Malvolia for the National Theatre in 2017.[15] Gwendoline Christie played Titania for the Bridge Theatre's *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2019, but with many of Oberon's key lines given to Titania, reversing the Oberon/Titania roles in the Bottom subplot. Cross-gender casting in Shakespeare has become more prominent as companies such as Shakespeare's Globe and The Royal Shakespeare Company have established goals of moving towards gender equity in casting decisions. Globe director Michelle Terry took on the role of Hamlet herself in 2018[16] as part of establishing equal representation for men and women through a "50/50 split on gender across her inaugural season."[17] The Globe production of *Shrew* in 2016, directed by Caroline Byrne, similarly aimed for gender parity by casting seven women and seven men in the company.[18] To promote the casting of the 2019 season that included Audibert's *Shrew*, artistic director Gregory Doran explained the importance of making the RSC "a company which reflects the nation in terms of gender, ethnicity, regionality, and disability" by arguing that representation matters in connecting with audiences: "If you look in the mirror and you don't see your own reflection ... then why would you engage?"[19] In his *Shrew*, Audibert creates a world that audiences will only recognize as a skewed reflection of their own—an inverted patriarchy where all the characters who hold societal power are reimagined as women.

In Audibert's *Shrew*, the women who joined the play were cast in roles of power (matriarchs, wealthy landowners, suitors, lead servants), while the men took on more subservient roles to reinforce the power dynamics of the matriarchal alternate

history. When asked about the impact of his casting choices in an interview with *The Standard*, Audibert does not suggest that his matriarchy is going to be a flattering depiction of female authority. Instead, he focuses on what the matriarchal world-building will mean for actresses and audiences who rarely get to experience onstage spaces controlled by women: "representation-wise it's going to be f***ing great, seeing all these powerful women really embodying these front-footed characters."[20] In the 2016 Globe production, Byrne achieved gender parity in casting while also calling attention to societal gender inequity by casting women as Tranio, Biondello, Grumio, and the Tailor—roles that are lower on the social hierarchy. In Audibert's production, women play the characters with more social authority, and the female servants (Trania, Biodella, Curtis) demonstrate power and confidence above that of the male servants and tradesmen (Grumio, Tailor, Haberdasher). Audibert notes that this casting choice pushed male actors who were used to playing more socially powerful roles to adjust to showing deference: "when we were auditioning, the men found it so hard. You realize how much more subtle it is to have to play on the back foot much more, something that so many of these traditionally female characters have to do."[21] Audibert's inverted power structure provides opportunities for actors, actresses, and audiences to experiment with different images of what power might look like—to consider a different take on a familiar character or plot through the reimagined setting and cast.

Even reviewers and scholars who criticized or expressed confusion about the cross-gender casting included at least one comment about how the casting made them rethink lines, scenes, or characters in the play. Berkowitz notes that "the sight of all those women onstage might make us aware of how very few females there are in the original text."[22] Billington praises the actresses portraying Bianca's suitors in the "subplot, which for once is clear and comprehensible," giving particular attention to the humor and "lasciviousness" that Sophie Stanton brings to the role of Gremia.[23] The cross-gender casting in this production emphasizes the gender of the characters as much as the actors. While viewers of an all-female production would see even more female representation onstage than the equity promised by the 2019 RSC summer season, the vast majority of the actresses would be dressing in masculine

clothing to portray male characters in a text that is still dominated by men. Women performing masculinity has subversive potential, as evidenced by Phyllida Lloyd's all-female staging of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Globe in 2003,[24] but the visual and verbal landscape of the play changes when most of the power comes from the matriarchal aesthetic of dressing and speaking as women in power. In his examination of cross-gender casting in stage productions of The *Taming of the Shrew*, Peter Kirwan distinguishes Audibert's re-gendering of the characters from the cross-gender casting used by single-gender companies such as Lloyd's production or Propeller's all-male version in 2007. Kirwan's essay adopts a classification system for gender-swapped casting, reworking casting terms used by Ayanna Thompson and the Non-Traditional Casting project to refer to casting actors of different races and ethnicities. Because the setting is an imagined matriarchy, Audibert's *Shrew* exemplifies what Kirwan calls "translocation, in which the setting of the play is changed to explore different structures and power relations."[25] The alternate universe of Audibert's production proved striking and disconcerting for audiences, inviting them to see power as female.

Setting and Inspiration: Alderman's *The Power*

Locating the play in an alternate-universe Elizabethan era complements the production's use of another of Kirwan's terms: "conceptual casting, which casts non-traditionally in order to enhance the play's social relevance… this may involve a change in the character's gender and pronouns [and] is designed to cause cognitive dissonance that generates interpretive significance."[26] The "cognitive dissonance" that Audibert's play generates for audiences results from the transformed gender "structures and power relations" of the imagined setting, which takes inspiration from Naomi Alderman's speculative novel *The Power*, which depicts an alternate universe in which women develop the ability to deliver painful electric shocks with a touch. Alderman's alternate universe begins as a patriarchal society nearly indistinguishable from our own, but the global power dynamics of the world gradually shift as it becomes clear that this new ability has made every woman a potential physical threat. At first, most women use their new power defensively, to fight back against patriarchal oppression, but

women increasingly step into the roles of oppressors themselves as it becomes clear that all women can easily injure or kill men with their bare hands. The society that emerges as women gain power is also similar to our own, but with the genders reversed. As reviewer Michael Schaub explains "the atrocities that women visit upon men in Alderman's novel—humiliation, torture, genital mutilation—are all, of course, things that happen today, but with the genders reversed. That is, perhaps, the point of the novel… [it] asks us to consider a dystopia that already exists, and has for centuries."[27] Physical dominance is linked with authority and control, and the matriarchy that emerges in the novel is simply an inverted patriarchy.

Audibert takes the same approach to matriarchy in constructing the gendered power structures of his *Shrew*. Rather than speculating about "how a matriarchy might operate with reference to contemporary or historical examples of matrilineal societies" he focuses on mirroring patriarchal oppression, but with women as the oppressors.[28] Alyson Miller's analysis of the use of inversion in *The Power* could just as easily be describing Audibert's *Shrew*:

> Inverting paradigms, however, is arguably essentially pragmatic, a means through which to observe how inequality is manifested in order to debunk its seeming naturalness and provoke transformation…The possibility of matriarchal rule, then, is not the point… its function in the narrative is not to suggest a new way of being, but rather to underline an existing dynamic in which self and other perpetually collide.[29]

In both Alderman's novel and Audibert's play, the emphasis is not on presenting matriarchy as a viable alternative to patriarchy, but to use inversion to show that systemic power imbalances are always destructive. The novel's influence on the production is acknowledged with a brief description of the novel's premise in the program next to a full-page illustration of a woman's hand, with a bolt of lightning gathering at her fingertip.[30] The setting for Audibert's *Shrew* is not the same as that of *The Power*, however. There is no indication that the women in Audibert's play pose a physical threat to men akin to Alderman's electric shocks, and no clear explanation for why this universe is under matriarchal control. Instead, the action of the play focuses on the dissonant

effect of women's power, with an emphasis on showing the aesthetic elements of the world-building rather than making the reason for the matriarchal rule clear to the audience.

The Aesthetics of Matriarchy

One of Audibert's stated goal in staging matriarchy is that he "wanted to see what it would feel like when the male voice is not the dominant one."[31] He explains further in his *Standard* interview: "I've sat in these classical [rehearsal] rooms a lot and I struggled with the idea that I would again have 67 per cent of the lines said by men."[32] By flipping the ratio, Audibert creates a play that features women as the voices of majority, and he rewrites Shakespeare's lines to further establish the world as a matriarchy. In addition to changing the pronouns and the names of the characters to reflect their re-gendering, the production also alters key lines to show an emphasis on women's legal and social authority. Fathers are not mentioned in discussions of lineage because estates pass from mothers to daughters. Petruchia is therefore mourning the passing of her mother, Antonia, when she comes to find a man "rich enough to be Petruchia's husband" and "wed wealthily in Padua."[33] Trania hires a traveler to impersonate Lucentia's mother Vincentia; when the real Vincentia travels to Padua later in the play, Petruchia and Katherine play at mistaking her for a "fair, lovely boy" instead of "a woman, old, wrinkled, faded, withered, and not a virgin, as thou say'st she is."[34] The cultural history of this alternate Elizabethan era is reframed by gender-swapping even the characters' allusions to myth and legend. Instead of the patience of Shakespeare's Katherine's making her "a second Grissel, and Roman Lucrece for her chastity" (35.2.1.298-9), Claire Price's Petruchia lauds Joseph Arkley's Katherine for being "a second Job, and Greek Narcissus for his chastity."[35] Gremio's "yea, leave that labour to great Hercules" (1.2.256) becomes Gremia's "yea, leave that labour to some great Amazon."[36] Almost every scene includes at least one small change in dialogue to reinforce the flipped power dynamic through a soundscape that associates feminine voices, pronouns, names, and myths with a legacy of power.[37]

The world-building of Audibert's *Shrew* uses clothing and hairstyles to challenge audience members' subconscious

expectations for how men and women occupy space—onstage and in life. In the official program for his *Taming of the Shrew*, Audibert explains that "Hannah Clarke's costumes also help create our world—the costumes worn by the female actors will be beautiful, imposing, expensive and involve lots of material. They will dominate the space. The costumes the male actors will wear will be much more delicate, even subtle."[38] The contrast between the two is particularly striking in the opening dance sequence, which replaces the Induction and serves to illustrate the transformed hierarchy of the staged world. The women enter first, moving smoothly in their imposing dresses to stand confidently as powerful music plays with a strong beat. When the men enter moments later, it is to lighter, higher music. The men wear smaller costumes, their hair is loose, and their steps are mincing as they move to a place on stage where they are surrounded by the women, who gaze at them before moving in to dance with them. While the aesthetics of the male characters could be described as feminized, particularly Bianco's long, flowing hair and flower-patterned clothing, the women are not costumed in men's clothing or presented in a masculine way.[39] Their authority and their clothing are coded as female, turning the characteristics of restrictive clothing for women in the Elizabethan era (corsets, heavy skirts, complicated hairstyles) into signifiers of power. The puffed sleeves and elaborate collars or ruffs of the dresses make the women wearing them seem larger and more important. The fabrics are rich, with the appearance of velvets or brocades, and the colors show connections among the characters (darker colors for the residents of Padua, red for Lucentia and her servants, green for Petruchia and hers). Their hair is heaped in elaborate updos: most of the upper-class women wear their hair in twin piles of coils, curls, and braids, often adorned with pearls or jewels. These hairstyles emphasize volume, adding inches to the height of each actress, particularly Petruchia's heaps of red-blond curls. Ella Hawkins notes that the "striking heart-shaped hairstyles" combine with the clothing to give an impression of "grandeur, authority, and dominance."[40] The women of Audibert's *Shrew* take up space.

Audibert's direction and the work of movement director Lucy Cullingford complement the costumes and reinforce how women confidently control the stage. The wide puffed sleeves accentuate the sweeping gestures of the women, who often stand with their

hands on their hips or lift their arms high in greeting to each other. The use of movement to claim space and status is taken to a comic extreme when Trania assumes Lucentia's identity and raises her arms dramatically over her head with a flourish of music every time she enters a formal social situation. Female characters also use their full, swirling skirts to demonstrate social hierarchy, showing authority by requiring other characters to step back or around the wide profiles of their dresses. Actresses who use the walkways at the front of the thrust stage take up most of the width of the walkway with their dresses, so when men enter or exit with women, the men step back because there is not room for them at the woman's side. For Biondella, whose skirts are more contained to accommodate the wheelchair she uses, the wheelchair itself fulfils a similar function as she speeds across the stage, causing other characters to jump out of her way. As Berkowitz notes, "zipping about in her wheelchair, Amy Trigg turns the very small role of Biondella into a Puck- or Ariel-like spirit directing traffic and keeping things moving."[41] Charlotte Arrowsmith, who plays Curtis, also has skirts that are less full to indicate her position as a servant, but her use of sign language to communicate gives her another way to use large movements and show confidence and power in her conversations with the other servants. The aesthetics of the production turn signifiers of femininity or disability (skirts, a wheelchair, sign language) into markers of power by connecting them to large movements and control of the stage.

The large movements that Audibert and Cullingford give to the female characters are a crucial part of the world-building, encouraging audiences to imagine a world where women do not face societal pressure to move cautiously or make themselves seem smaller. In her study of women and body image, Cecelia Hartley argues that in 21st century America, "a woman is taught early to contain herself, to keep arms and legs close to her body and take up as little space as possible."[42] Psychologist Taryn A. Myers similarly notes that "Western culture forces women to not only become smaller not only physically but also to take on a smaller, quieter role in society."[43] These observations are not limited to academic studies; they are part of our popular culture. Infotainment site *Elite Daily* explains that women consistently move through public and private places differently than men do:

> Why is it that being female means we have to be aware of the space that we "deserve" to occupy? For our entire lives, women learn to be accommodating and amenable, while men are taught to be adamant and stand their ground. Even physically, we fold up into ourselves, cross our legs and feel small in a chair. Guys, however, have no problem stretching out and taking up too much space …We see this trend: females feeling pressure to minimize themselves -- on multiple levels.[44]

From diet culture to seating on public transit, women often face societal pressure to seem unimposing, unobtrusive. Audibert's production reverses this dynamic, staging powerful women who use their gestures and their costumes to try to show power by occupying space and moving others aside, while the male characters' movements are smaller and more deferential. While Audibert's matriarchy is not depicted as fair or desirable society, seeing women confidently controlling the stage resonates with audiences.

Audibert's inversion of societal expectations of movement builds on the ways that previous directors have utilized cross-gender casting, especially Mark Rylance and Phyllida Lloyd at Shakespeare's Globe in London. Women playing men on the Globe stage, such as those who worked with movement coach Marcello Magni on Lloyd's all-female *The Taming of the Shrew* (2003), were "encouraged to 'take up more space' and open out their shoulders" to embody "masculine movement," much like the gestures used by the actresses on Audibert's stage.[45] The notable difference comes in the way that Audibert re-genders the characters; the cross-gender casting on Lloyd's stage is a performance of masculinity, while Audibert's actresses code their confident, powerful movements as female. By contrast, men playing women on the Globe stage were advised to take "very small steps" because "400 years ago, a woman's clothing meant that she couldn't take huge strides."[46] In Rylance's all-male *Twelfth Night* (2003, 2012), the actors playing female characters (including Rylance himself as Olivia) appear to be "floating across the stage as if on wheels," an illusion created by short, rapid steps concealed by long skirts.[47] Chad Allen Thomas describes the movement in the prelude to the play: "Rylance and Shorey begin to glide, limited by their costume pieces into

taking smaller steps, their flowing movement distinguishing their characters as highly stylized versions of femininity.[48] In Audibert's production, the actors playing Katherine, Bianco, and the widow use more restricted movement than the women, but the men do not use the gliding steps popularized by the Globe productions. Instead, the technique is adopted by some of Audibert's female characters, particularly Sophie Stanton's Gremia, who moves so smoothly and rapidly that she seems almost to be flying. While Rylance's Olivia uses the movement to show both the high social status of the character and the societal restrictions that come with her status and gender, Stanton's Gremia seems to embrace her version of the glide as a power movement without restraint.[49]

While women's movement in the performance is used to demonstrate social control, their power is rarely ever enforced by violence on stage. There is an implication that the military presence of the world is female and that weapons demonstrate social position. Trania's exaggerated gestures show her glee and pride when she receives Lucentia's sword and cape as symbols of her raised status when she takes on Lucentia's identity. Claire Price explains that because her Petruchia is a soldier, "we redefined the corset as a kind of armour, a status symbol. It has to be credible that Petruchia can use a sword and handle herself."[50] Many of the women wear swords, and the men do not. These weapons are almost never drawn onstage, however, except for comic effects. For example, Gremia spends several minutes struggling to get her sword out of her scabbard before awkwardly brandishing it to defend Vincentia when Trania tries to have her arrested. The few moments of actual violence in the play are staged without weapons. When Petruchia attacks her male servant Grumio for not knocking at the gate, he cries as he covers his head in self-defense, constrained by both his gender and his social class to not hit his mistress. Bianco (and Bianco's suitors) treat Katherine as a potential physical threat, and Katherine defiantly strikes Petruchia on their first meeting, but he quickly backs down in the face of her threat of retaliation, and he does not attempt physical violence in the rest of the scene. Even when Petruchia restrains Katherine in a headlock, her control over his movement comes more from her ability to express confidence and dominance through language than from actively defeating him in combat. The fact that Katherine is taller and presumably

physically stronger than Petruchia is a sticking point for some audience members, who question why Katherine does not use violence to fight back against Petruchia's physical manhandling (womanhandling?) and psychological manipulation.

While violence is central to the enforcement of and the rebellion against the social structures in *The Power*, it is less important to the world of Audibert's *Shrew*. As Kirwan observes, "Audibert retained all of the power dynamics of a structural patriarchy but with a key tool of that system – the threat of physical/sexual violence – downplayed if not entirely removed."[51] Michael Billington conversely complains that the play "never shows why physical abuse and financial opportunism are any more endearing when practised by women than by men."[52] Academics accept Alderman's speculative premise of a reversed patriarchy developing because women become more physically threatening than men, recognizing the plot device as "replicating a structure in which power is always divided upon gendered lines, exchanging a castrated object for a castrating subject."[53] When Audibert uses the same tactic of replication and inversion without clearly establishing any reason why women could be a physical threat to men, however, critics and scholars are more inclined to question the matriarchal worldbuilding. Our understanding that patriarchal power stems from an implicit threat of violence is so deeply engrained that it is sometimes easier to accept the premise that women could learn to channel electricity with their hands than to imagine a systemic gendered power imbalance that is not enforced through physical threats.

Holding the Mirror Up to Nature

In his advice to the players, Hamlet asserts that "the purpose of playing" is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to Nature; to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.20-2). The year she took on the position of Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe, Michelle Terry justified her commitment to 50/50 gender parity in casting the 2018 season by explaining that "if our job is to hold a mirror up to nature, then we've got to truly reflect the society in which we live."[54] Audibert's *Shrew* reminds us that mirror images

are reversed. The gender-swapped world of this *Shrew* is not presented as a matriarchal utopia, and the play does not suggest that female dominance is any better than male dominance. Instead, it reinforces the idea that systemic societal inequities are destructive both to individuals and to society as a whole. But reversing the gender dynamics in Shakespeare's play offers an opportunity to re-define the circuits of performance available for women. The practices of translocation and conceptual cross-casting utilized by Audibert here can be used elsewhere to give actresses a chance to perform power without tying that power to a performance of masculinity, illustrating another way that directors and companies can fulfil their commitments to onstage equity.

Notes

1. This article cites both Shakespeare's text and the adjusted text of the RSC performance. Where Shakespeare's text is used instead of the production text, the following version is used: William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series Complete Works*, eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan, and HR Woudhuysen (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

2. *The Taming of the Shrew*, written by William Shakespeare, dir. Justin Audibert, costumes Hannah Clark, movement Lucy Cullingford, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, England, June 19, 2019.

3. Richard Hall, "*The Taming of The Shrew* -The Lowry, Salford," *The Reviews Hub*, September 29, 2019. https://www.thereviewshub.com/the-taming-of-the-shrew-the-lowry-salford/

4. Robert Tanitch, "All the Male Roles are Played by Women and all the Female Roles are Played by Men," *Mature Times*, November 12, 2019. https://www.maturetimes.co.uk/robert-tanitch-reviews-rscs-the-taming-of-the-shrew/

5. Ayanna Thompson, "All That Glistens Is Not Gold," interview by Gene Demby, *Code Switch*, NPR, August 21, 2019. https://www.npr.org/transcripts/752850055?storyId=752850055?storyId=752850055

6. For more information on the ideas surrounding feminist pre-history and goddess culture, see Mary J. Magoulick, *The Goddess Myth in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture: A Feminist Critique* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022). Magoulick notes that "the mythic goddess's prehistoric period is portrayed by believers, in boldly utopian terms, as peaceful, nature centered, and worshipful of women," which gives some context to why audiences might have expected a matriarchy to be portrayed positively (31).

7. Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861–1900 (*Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 122-3.

8. Amy Borsuk, "Review: *The Taming of the Shrew* at Barbican," *Exeunt Magazine*, November 8, 2019. http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-taming-shrew-barbican-rsc/

9. Gerald Berkowitz, "*The Taming Of The Shrew*: RSC at Barbican Theatre," *TheatreGuide: London*, Winter 2019-2020. http://www.theatreguidelondon.co.uk/reviews/taming19.htm

10. Ella Hawkins, "*The Taming of the Shrew* dir. by Justin Audibert (review)," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 38.1 (Spring 2020): 156-160.

11. Katharine Cognard-Black, "*Taming of the Shrew(s)*": Explorations of Gender and Power in Directing an Original Adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*," (Honors Thesis, Bucknell University, Fall 2021), 35, 46. https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/honors_theses/article/1591/&path_info=CognardBlack_Katharine_Honors121521.pdf

12. Justin Audibert, "Program Notes: *The Taming of the Shrew*," dir. Justin Audibert, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, England, June 19, 2019, 6.

13. Justin Audibert, "*The Taming of the Shrew*," interview with the author, June 27, 2019, audio recording, 55:43.

14. Lauren Sharkey, "The RSC Just Committed To Casting A Truly Diverse Cast For 2019 & It's About Time," *Bustle*, September 12, 2018. https://www.bustle.com/p/the-royal-shakespeare-company-makes-diversity-in-theatre-a-priority-for-2019-tbh-its-about-time-11885385

15. Elizabeth Schafer, "Why Female Thespians Like Tamsin Greig Shouldn't Get their Hands Off Male Roles: She has Completely Reconceived Shakespeare's Character," *The Independent*, March 21, 2017. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/tamsin-greig-twelfth-night-malvolia-malvolio-national-theatre-gender-bending-roles-thespians-a7641331.html

16. Natasha Tripney, "Hamlet, Thy Name is Woman: Why Michelle Terry's Globe is Staging Post-Gender Shakespeare," *The Independen*t, May 16, 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/hamlet-globe-michelle-terry-shakespeare-gender-blind-cross-cast-as-you-like-ensemble-deaf-a8350886.html

17. Yan Chen, "The Path to Gender Parity on Shakespearean Stages," *Hartford Stage*, 2018. https://www.hartfordstage.org/henry-v/stagenotes/gender-parity-in-shakespeare/#:~:text=At%20Shakespeare's%20Globe%20in%20April,small%20parts%20played%20by%20men

18. For a more detailed account of Byrne's *Shrew*, see Emer McHugh's chapter in *The Taming of the Shrew: The State of Play*, eds. Heather C. Easterling and Jennifer Flaherty (London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2021).

19. Sharkey, "The RSC Just Committed."

20. Fiona Mountford, "Justin Audibert interview: 'I Struggled with the Idea that 67 Per Cent of Lines would be Said by Men,'" *The Standard*, February 11, 2019. https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/justin-audibert-interview-shakespeare-taming-shrew-a4063176.html

21. Mountford, "Justin Audibert Interview."

22. Berkowitz, "*The Taming Of The Shrew*: RSC at Barbican Theatre."

23. Michael Billington, "*The Taming of the Shrew* Review – RSC's Battle of Reversed Sexes," *The Guardian*, March 19, 019. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/mar/19/the-taming-of-the-shrew-review-rsc-royal-shakespeare-theatre-stratford-upon-avon

24. See Peter Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew: Cross-Gender Casting in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Taming of the Shrew: The State of Play*, 128.

25. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew," 128.

26. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew," 128.

27. Michael Shaub, "Electrifying 'Power' Flips the Gender Script to Unsettling Effect," *National Public Radio*, October 11, 2017. https://www.npr.org/2017/10/11/555689738/electrifying-power-flips-the-gender-script-to-unsettling-effect

28. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew," 135.

29. Alyson Miller, "'Day of the Girls': Reading Gender, Power, and Violence in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*," *College Literature* 47 (2020): 406-7.

30. "Program Image: *The Taming of the Shrew*," dir. Justin Audibert, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, England, June 19, 2019.

31. Audibert, "Program Notes: *The Taming of the Shrew*," 6.

32. Mountford, "Justin Audibert Interview."

33. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

34. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

35. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

36. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

37. I was surprised to check one of Lucentia's lines against Lucentio's and find it unchanged: both Trania and Tranio are "as dear as Anna to the queen of Carthage was" (1.1.153).

38. Audibert, "Program Notes: *The Taming of the Shrew*," 6.

39. The exception is Petruchia, who spends the wedding scene and much of the second half of the play dressed in men's clothing (a larger and more imposing version of the costumes that the men in the play wear). Katherine, by contrast, wears a white shirt that hangs like a nightgown over bare legs. This abrupt shift disrupts the costume coding of female power that the audience experiences in the first half of the play, with the effect of reverting the stage pictures back to the patriarchal norm of a character in masculine clothing abusing a character in feminized clothing.

40. Hawkins, "*The Taming of the Shrew* dir. by Justin Audibert (review)," 157.

41. Berkowitz, "*The Taming Of The Shrew*: RSC at Barbican Theatre."

42. Cecelia Hartley, "Letting Ourselves Go: Making Room for the Fat Body in Feminist Scholarship," *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, ed. Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 61.

43. Taryn A. Myers, "Feminist Theories on Eating Disorders," in *The Wiley Handbook of Eating Disorders*, eds. Linda Smolak and Michael P. Levine (Chichester: Wiley, 2015), 242.

44. "The Proliferation of the Shrinking Woman: How Women Are Taught To Grow Inward," *Elite Daily*, December 30, 2013. https://www.elitedaily.com/women/growth-proliferation-shrinking-woman-taking-space-woman

45. Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Mark Rylance at the Globe* (London: Bloomsbury Arden: 2017), 180.

46. Purcell, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, 179-80.

47. Chad Allen Thomas, "On Queering *Twelfth Night*," *Theatre Topics* 20.2 (Sep 2010): 106.

48. Thomas, "On Queering *Twelfth Night*," 106.

49. On the night that I attended the production (June 19, 2019), the audience burst into spontaneous applause at Gremia's movements, and I overheard young students from a school group debating whether or not she might have been concealing a skateboard under her skirt.

50. Natasha Tripney, "'Women are the Powerbrokers': Gender-Flipping Shakespeare's Shrew," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/feb/25/women-are-the-powerbrokers-gender-flipping-shakespeares-shrew

51. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew,"135.

52. Billington, "*The Taming of the Shrew* Review."

53. Miller, "Day of the Girls," 406.

54. Chen, "The Path to Gender Parity on Shakespearean Stages."